

Luxury Food Items in Contemporary Society as Viewed in Surveys Conducted in Seven Cities in the World

- Caught between Health Consciousness and Prevalence of Industrial Goods

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Summary

In 2003, we Shikohin Study Project (Luxury Food Item Study Group) conducted questionnaire and interview surveys in Seoul, Shanghai, Paris, London, New York, Los Angeles and Tokyo, concerning luxury food items. In this paper, we report our findings in these surveys about the general situation surrounding luxury food items in contemporary urban society.

The most striking finding was that a strong "health consciousness" existed in all the cities surveyed, as supported by people's desire for luxury food items to be "natural". Specifically, the survey results demonstrated "aversion to tobacco" and a "highly positive view of tea".

Moreover, people showed a marked tendency to consume luxury food items "privately" to "stay awake" or "feel refreshed". We learned that people consumed "coffee" and "tea" mainly for these purposes. "Tea (black, green or brown)", which is generally believed to reach consumers in a "natural" state, was particularly highly evaluated worldwide.

Come to think of it, however, luxury food items including soft drinks sold in cans or glass/PET bottles, involve, in their manufacturing and distribution, advanced industrial technology. Many luxury food items are indeed "industrial products", far from being "natural". This seems to point to a contradiction in people's awareness.

This led us to turn our attention to product names of perfume: Poison, Addict, Opium, Egoist... Many of them are cleverly associated with an image of something "poisonous". In fact, the consumption of luxury food items used to be founded on the assumption that it was a "vice" allowed not to children but only to sensible adults who may "indulge themselves in moderation", at their own responsibility. Something has changed over the years, as health consciousness has prevailed. It is possible that the "poisonous" image has disappeared from luxury food items and remained only in perfume, a luxury item not for oral consumption.